departure

A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Nos. 1-11
1952-1957

KRAUS REPRINT
NENDELN LIECHTENSTEIN
1968

First published in Oxford
Reprinted with the permission of Alan Brownjohn
by
KRAUS REPRINT
a Division of
KRAUS-THOMSON ORGANIZATION LIMITED
Nendeln / Liechtenstein
1968
Printed in Switzerland

Vol. 1 No. 1

departure

A MAGAZINE OF LITERATURE AND THE ARTS

Editors :

JOHN ADLARD . ALAN BROWNJOHN

Contents

AUDEN'S NONES — *F. G. Steiner*

THE AUDIENCE AT A VERSE PLAY — *Morton Demmery*

A REVERSION TO TYPE — *Naomi Shepherd*

POEMS *by*

Lynette Roberts — *James Reeves*

Hardiman Scott — *Elizabeth Jennings*

Simon Broadbent — *James Price*

etc.

NINEPENCE

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/departure-1952_1952_1_1

DEPARTURE

VOLUME ONE NUMBER ONE

EDITORIAL

WE shall not begin "Departure" with any of the aggressive declarations of policy that were once as much expected of literary magazines as of political parties. We have no case to make for a new literary movement, and no intention of trying to launch one. There are, however, certain convictions which, though held by many magazines of literature and the arts, we should like to have our readers think we held with unique strength.

The first is that contemporary poetry and writing in general are worth printing andcriticising. We do not believe that there has been a decline in the standard of poetry written in England since the war and the immediate post-war period. And if you want to call our bluff, frankly we do not in the least share in the fashionable and indolent cynicism about present-day Oxford writing. The distinguished performances of many recent and present Oxford poets in the weeklies and the surviving poetry magazines are the answers to the critic who has never advanced beyond the "state" poems of some Sunday newspapers.

Next, we refuse to subscribe to the view that innovation in art is no longer valid. Much as we are bound to respect the increased awareness of literary tradition, and support the arduous demands of a new criticism, we at least will not suffer them to stifle experiment or write off whole reaches of literature for trifling reasons. And a disinterested academic approach to the function and forms of poetry ill-becomes a writer whose literary conscience tells him that he should like literature first.

Lastly, we cannot agree that art has no part to play in shaping and improving society, or that it can be put away when "more serious matters" have to be seen to, be they famine, plague, bankruptcy, financial or moral, or war. We feel that, although literature and the forces of civilisation seem to carry negligible weight in present-day society, such an admission is half-way towards denying the true value of all art.

But shall we now allow our contributors to speak for themselves?

LYNETTE ROBERTS

You within the enchanted circle

This the legend like lake mist curling,
Round the barren heights of Hell,
Swamping man with bitter agony,
To the heel of swadde's pebbled shore,
The Lady of the Lake.

This the recurring theme and pattern,
As love and death descends upon our will,
She whose taste for individual freedom,
Divided her from others, and came,
Upon that Black Hill, yours:

Gave him, hand, love, and life.
Showed wit at a funeral: foresight at a wedding:
An acquired taste for rural bread:
And no love for locks or bolts:
His sweet demon lover.

Now as the monstrous season turns,
Thins the buttermilk of days,
Scouring his heart, and her mind:
At her command over the rippled lake,
At the third blow, turned,

Called her young heifer of flour white hide,
Bid her black bull calf "Prydein come."
All three dissolved into the wavering haze,
To her Living Grave and Lake of Birth,
Like midges in the air.

Like midges in the evening light
They stung and blocked his path;
He sent her combs for her sunflower hair
From his journey somewhere to new pasture:
Eyes watered like the sun.

Her flesh cooled like the evening pool,
Willows fell red on her shores,
Swallows stirred her gravel face,
Transcribed every act,
Fish fled from her side.

JAMES REEVES

'A Letter to Posterity'

(Suggested by a series of radio talks under that title)

This I would say: I see you perfectly
  In your unfashionable, favourite chair,
With legs curled up and cheek on fist, your page
  Shadowed by indeterminate brown hair.

You read of us perhaps, or think of him,
  The unmitigable man who steals your mind,
I hear you sigh, and see you smile, and wonder
  What comedy in us or him you find.

We have philosophers, and so have you.
  'Our age' they say, not knowing what they mean.
But I can tell you, dear, what our age is;
  What yours is too, and others all have been.

Cities and ships we purpose for your ease,
  To see you grateful, smiling in your chair;
If we forget or fail, or you turn peevish,
  We burn and break in fury of despair.

Ask that dark man who blunders through your thoughts
  Why from the precipice he brings you flowers.
Smile on him if you can: only your smile
  Can make his age a better age than ours.

DERWENT MAY

Christmas Poem

Small girls are the tenants of Christmas: when now
Quiet in their pews each stands at the crib's side
And folds a coverlet in prayer over the crying Child
Happy and awed, and alone in a new pride.

Later in their pain they will not remember
(Turning to one comfortless standing by)
How each ravished smile was told on a smaller face;
But the ceremony will proceed, until with torn eye

Old, they will return to where the crib still stands
Seeing there a child whose features will be known
But passed beyond every dream of return now
To where they stoop; and again they will be alone.

HARDIMAN SCOTT

Autumn, no Autumn

We do not see the leaves in this city,
The leaves crisped and curled, rucked and rounding on
The autumn air: freckled birch and rusty
Beech, yellowed ash and willow, and rowan
Streaked red, and crinkled the hawthorn crimsoned,
Skimmed by the coursing winds all to the ground.

All is a continual autumn, and all
Falling unfulfilled. In crimped and carking
Faces carping eyes smart beneath the pall
Of drifting smoke, rough in the throat, inking
The buildings unintelligibly, with
Scrawling, messy fingers writing its myth.

The city drifts and falls to its ragged
Fringes, fingering out towards the fields
Nervously, a foreigner to its laggard
Lover, who frailly knows what autumn yields.
But here there are no seasons, no knowing
How the earth or the heart may be growing.

In some garden perhaps a Michaelmas
Clump of daisies whisks up a purple spray,
But even these small clues neglected pass
The purblind eyes that strain through leadened grey
Configurations of the air to see
Their vacant fortunes crimsoned hopefully.

O, how to strike through to the autumn leaf,
To shed the autumn blood and know my year,
How to penetrate this grey, griefless grief,
To awaken the still slumbering fear?
Perhaps with the thrust of another heart
To beat the pulse of autumn's deathless art.

SIMON BROADBENT

On a Book of Philosophy

The dust descends along the spine;
The pages wrinkle, line by line.
Within, the clockwork heart vibrates,
And, eager to lay hands on mine,
Each fleshless word gesticulates.
The master's blood is here distilled,
That robot arteries be filled
And matter think as he had thought.
Years since, the dying writer willed
That his mind live and mine be caught.

A REVERSION TO TYPE

by Naomi Shepherd

"IN this room, ladies and gentlemen, the royal births took place before the eyes of the public, who were admitted according to custom". The guide paused for breath, his eyes fixed on a distant cornice.—"The furnishings, of course, are not the original ones, but replicas which will give you some idea of the splendour in which they lived".

Mrs. Chitterick looked at her husband. He was showing interest for the first time that afternoon, as he gazed at the beery guide, and she nudged his elbow. He was dead to her touch, so she glanced round for her son, who lolled, framed in a magnificent window, his back to the gardens of Versailles. His feet were enormous. Mrs. Chitterick felt indignant on behalf of posterity. He had no right to look so bored, so large-footed on his first visit to Versailles; Mrs. Chitterick had been twice before, and even on her third visit she was quite hysterical with appreciation. After all, it was for Cyril's sake that his parents had come on the motor coach tour; they knew it by heart anyway. Cyril was worse than his father.

"This room is connected to that of the king by a secret passage", the guide intoned—"But, as you will see, the door is invisible" he paused to remember his latest English idiom "Flush with the wall!" Two Swedes shrugged their shoulders and an Italian attached himself adroitly to the party just ahead. This English was beyond them.

"French girls are either *rigidly* chaperoned or *utterly* uninhibited" — Cyril remembered the words of one of his undergraduate friends. Which was she, the girl with the garrulous grey eyes and the black beret? She seemed to be alone on the tour, quite absorbed in the guide's words, glancing up at Cyril every moment or two. Typically French, he mused, with that inconsequential gravity in her looks - - - - - There was nothing cautious about her expression, he thought approvingly. He knew the exact word to apply to her—but what was the exact meaning of "grisette"?

In a little while they would be in the Hall of Mirrors, thought Mr. Chitterick, as he edged away from his wife's side,—and then it would be too late to ask the guide. Better to buttonhole him now, while he was wiping the froth from his lips, having given up the attempt to outshout the huge bully of a guide from the American Express whose party had arrived considerably later but who was already three *salons* ahead. Mr. Chitterick cleared his throat; what would the guide's reaction be? *Did* the things exist as late as the seventeenth century? was it perhaps only during the Crusades? Cyril probably knew, being at the university, but Mr. Chitterick felt shy of asking him. Suddenly he made up his mind. Damn it all, the French were a sensible lot.

Mrs. Chitterick wondered what her husband was asking the guide. She could never think of anything to ask, she just accepted things. Nothing could surprise her since the day during the war when a neigh-

bour told her that the Japanese had dropped a bomb in the middle of Kilburn High Road. Mrs. Chitterick pushed her way through the crowd to Cyril and she felt that she moved gracefully among the sweating foreigners and their corpulent, unambiguous women. She had no need to go on a conducted tour, they weren't short of cash to hire a car, but you saw some interesting, pathetic types this way. As he smiled at her she was so glad that he had a reasonably smart mother. Mrs. Chitterick knew that black was always right in France, even though linen got rather crushed in the motor coach. It was clear that most of the women in this party must be provincials, they wore *such* bright cottons. She tucked her little chiffon scarf more neatly into her collar. "I'm tired" she said to her son "I get puffed too quickly". She gave a depreciatory little laugh, "Perhaps I'm getting fat." He did not contradict her, so she went on hastily "It's the food I can't resist. I can eat croissants *ad nauseam*!" Cyril pursed his lips.

With the guide leading the way, the party moved into the Hall of Mirrors. When they had all filed in facing the great windows, he raised his voice in pride. "Et voila", he said forcefully as his charges looked in muddled fashion in every direction save the right one, "Et voila the celebrated hall of mirrors!" They turned, and faced an impressive array of ladders and pots of paint, and an occasional reflection of their surprised faces looking out from the high glass which was coated with circles of sticky polish. "Repairs are going on" explained the guide as a footnote.

Gwenda was disappointed, and it was no use pretending otherwise. Her first sight of the famous mirrors, and all she could see of her reflection was the black beret glimmering somewhere amid the sticky circles. What was she to tell her aunt when she got back to Paris? Still, she supposed as she caught Cyril's eye yet once again, and blushed, there were compensations for coming by oneself in the motor coach. That French boy was so sweet. Everything about him was so. . . . very Gallic, one might say. His air of slight bashfulness which was sure to be deceptive, and the way he moved, as if he took plenty of exercise, but how intelligent his eyes were. Frenchmen had marvellous eyes, and they were marvellous husbands, or was it bad ones? Anyway they were assured, and never, never timid. And his mother was typical too. He was probably a law student, and she was up from the provinces, one could see that he knew all about Versailles and was taking so much pleasure in showing her around. All French provincial women wore those rusty black outfits. There was certainly a lot to be said for going on these conducted tours, one saw such interesting, pathetic types.

Cyril was enchanted by those grey eyes. They spoke just loudly enough for him to hear, but not too boldly for comfort. He glanced in well-concealed amusement from his mother to the girl. Cyril could not resist a grin. Would his mother object if he wanted to stay on a little in Paris, he wondered.

Mr. Chitterick was decidedly piqued. He couldn't make out what the fellow had said, and he could have sworn that he had put the

question properly, but perhaps the chap had answered him in some sort of argot. Mr. Chitterick stared disconsolately at the scratched table on which the peace treaty had been signed. It looked lopsided to him.

Gwenda realised that she was a little nervous. How comical that was! He was sure to approach her sooner or later, but her French was so bad, Hampstead French. That was unimportant, however, the essential thing was to appear quite at her ease and to take everything as a matter of course. She tried to remember the details of an article which she had read in a French women's magazine in the hairdressers. It took the form of a questionnaire and shed light, thought Gwenda, on the habits and outlook of the French woman,—so much more competent in dealing with emotional problems than her English counterpart. None of the questions that Gwenda could recall were particularly helpful at the moment, the problems they treated were different, somehow. Gwenda could only remember being asked whether a woman should know her moments of greatest fecundity? It was puzzling.

The guide led his party down the final flight of stairs with relief. Now he could let them loose in the gardens until it was time for the motor coach to return. With great deliberation, he spat into one of the fountains. The tourists stumbled out, dusty eyed, on to the sunlit terrace. Cyril slipped away from his parents and reached Gwenda's side. They stood for a moment forlorn under the beaten walls; they fidgeted and the gravel cracked under their shoes. Cyril relied on the accent he had picked up from religious attendance at his local repertory cinema; he felt bilious with courage. "Il est bete, hein? he said abruptly, indicating a leering stone figure on the fountain side.

"Ah, oui," she replied simply, her eyes wide.

"Il fait beau temps", said Cyril, with a significant lift of the eye brows.

Gwenda felt nervous. The most ordinary things had a double meaning in French. But what a charming accent he had. Basque, perhaps, or would it be Breton. "Mais bien sure" she replied laughingly.

Cyril shuffled delightedly. "Allons voir les jardins" he suggested, and they started to walk towards the grass. Sweet girl, enchanting accent. Breton; was it, or conceivably Basque?"

ELIZABETH JENNINGS

Woman in Love

All familiar thoughts grow strange to her.
One thought insists on opening each door,
Each window on to love, the others stir
And creep as strangers, skulking on the edge
To find an entry by some subterfuge.

But she dismisses them and grows one thought
Whatever hands obey, whatever voice
Speaks of indifference. She is tamed, self-taught.
Peace in a high room now defines the noise
As meaning less and she, beyond the range
Of conversation, finds no dreaming strange.

Yet when he comes will then unlearn it all,
Find thought within her mind and fact in him
At variance, almost inimical,
And as peacemaker will exile the dream,
Escape her own mind and acknowledging
This love as strange enact a truer pledging.

GILLIAN CRAIG

The Singing World

The sky seemed turned to gold
Or was it that my eye moved
The black wing of the raven
The singing world?
Incessant in its wandering
The ice-blue cloud inhales the raven's wing
Higher and higher into the naked sun
A fire of feathers breaks into an arc of song.
Never shall I move my compass point
To trace this arc, nor join
The swift parabola of fluctuating waves
To spell out the seven letters of the moon's name.

I am the diver who forgot my sadness.
When I found the sea's grains
Passing through my hands,
The cormorant who found cadence in hollow caves
When there was none in his own porous tongue.

I saw my other self rise up to meet me
From the pool's green depth
And did not understand
When the sea turned to granite in my hands.

MICHAEL SHANKS

Gateway to a Maltese Villa

A snigger of arabesque
Frustrates the wind's dry purpose
Where the brown peninsula
Beckons to Sicily
And yachts preciously skirmish
Over the green and rankled
Furrows of the noon-deep tide.

In autumn now in England
Evening and leaves are falling
Through a sky drowsy with towers;
In the close where the teashop nestles
Forever in the shadow of bells
It is time for crumpets, and comments
That the nights are drawing in.

Yet here the earth ignores
The gold and purple bleeding
And the dancers dead in the forest;
What blind sea-sculptor fashioned
From brutal, obtuse stone
This cold-lipped mask of beauty
That grips and tears the wind?

Plato steals time's magic:
The bright and flowering rain
From Danae's fallen tower,
Intolerably crystal,
Glitters in the dead stars.
I seek in the rainbow world
(White swans ride the red river)

Tears, thunder, and the golden
Shouting for gathered harvest,
Lost children crying, salt pillars
Dark on the wind-vexed city;
Foam, flame and column
Are our hearts' symbols.
Yet through stone eyes I see

A sunburnt virginal desert
Arid to eternity;
No cry in the gold-capped woods
Of lover, bird, or the wind-wild
Nymphs sweet harlotry—
Only the picture-postcard
Blue of a yacht-starved sea.

JENNY JOSEPH

Entre Chien et Loup

Stand still at this wide window
And watch the birds and the wind in the leaves
Before darkness fades them;
Wait here and listen
To the voices and the footsteps beyond those doors.
And if it should be thought
That with no lights or movement
The silent room is empty
You need not therefore be deaf to the birds' singing.
Do not regard the door: neither fling it wide nor lock it
But before you throw the garden to the dark,
Turning the light on, brushing the hearth and drawing the curtains,
Open the window wide and look at the river
For the floods are rising; at the scattered leaves and the birds
Before the gardener's boy sweeps them away.
Let the voices and footsteps pass beyond those doors
While you stand waiting and watch the leaves in the wind.

DONALD HALL

Three Stanzas

It is a sudden birth
That in this moon emergence now
Flowers among the textures of the wind.
It builds a darkness full of tiny leaves
Whose voices like the wink of bells
Make music of our motions.

That burden falls, and all
The heavy movement is at end.
Now water flows where other sounds are gone
And slowly through the underbrush the flood
Seeps up and chases frightened deer
To hilly farming country.

The barn is burning, o,
The barn is burning on the hill,
The cattle low and blunder in their stalls,
The horses scream and hurl their burning manes,
The barn is burning where the night
Sweetens the seed of fire.

JAMES PRICE

The Child and the Mountain

Negligent of dreams their boasted love was kept,
Ritual of consciousness. In arms, but apart, they slept;
Walking, virgin again and separate,
Through landscapes of the private heart.

Poet among the antelopes, his eyes were blue and rapt:
He never knew her valley dream, nor how she wept
And called to him, nor whom she wrestled with. Alone,
Up white and silent glaciers he moved somnambulist.

She also, entering sleep, forsook familiar territories,
And walked among the foreign beasts and birds, as she would prove
The holiness of human love. And suddenly she recognised
The child their waking loving had refused.

Then through a dark forest she fled, and fugitive saw
High summer alter to winter, the leaves fall;
And still the child behind her, swift, sure-footed,
As if all wild paths of the wood were known to it.

Dreams and fables, they said as they woke; and parted the trees
That their love be continued. The night's unease
Was inward, not to be exhumed; obediently they turned
To silence, love's profoundest compromise.

So she was never told his steep ascent, nor he the ghost.
By day she wandered through the empty house, and nightly raced
Within the frozen wood. She did not tell him of her fear,
Nor how her fear, changing to love, wished her to cease fleeing,

And turn, and close the phantom to her breast.
He, unaware of death even as he entered the mist
Curling about the angry summit, climbed as one
Forgetting human origin.

NORMAN BESWICK

A Preface

A brief undeath which weeps that it must die
has peopled places, built beneath the sky
a town, under the stars of day and night
whose own disintegration is their light:
stretched, over the unknowing, flags of hope,
and built a city's foothold on the slope
of all-unlivingness. The lamps are bright
which spread a mask of day on skies of night.

And I present you with our world, to make
what can be made of it. The cosmic ache
of ancestors made towns, and all the rules
of living with the dead: erected schools
to teach the bearable, the skills, the arts
which decorate or salvage: made our parts
half-written for us. Their recorded voice
whispers truth's human lie behind our choice.

Ours that inheritance: but we, like them
imperfect, shining stars upon the hem
of death's majority, will see our time
foreshortened, all the areas of crime
large looming round the districts of our praise.
We are bequeathed their knowledge of malaise
to couple with desire, and so achieve
some change upon the world we shortly leave.

And thus restart the cycle of men's hope,
the myth, the new objective giving scope
for further building: thus begin again
from need and the known Nothing. We are men
undead, among the lifeless and unborn,
our value life, our difference: not forlorn
but suffering and rejoicing, flooding night
Wih huge disintegration into light.

THE AUDIENCE AT A VERSE PLAY

by Morton Demmery

IF you read in Daniel 5, verse 2, that "Belshazzar, whiles he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the King, and his princes, his wives and his concubines, might drink therein," you are interested and the imagination perhaps enflamed. If then you hear William Walton's setting of these words, for a large orchestra (with two harps, organ and full complement of percussion) fortified with much additional brass, sung by a large choir, the impact upon you is much greater, and any interest you may have felt in the passage tends to be swamped by the wave of sensuous experience which you enjoy when you hear Walton's exotic oratorio. Useless to compare the two kinds of enjoyment: if they are on the same scale then they are at opposite ends of it. If the literature can enflame the imagination, the music can set it on fire. Recollected in tranquillity the effect of Walton's music and the story of Daniel might equally set the imagination aglow: at the moment of impact the one is immeasurably more intense than the other.

When a playwright writes for the theatre he is choosing to leave his mark upon his hearers more in the way of Walton than in the way of Daniel. That modern playwrights are drawn towards writing in verse is sufficiently obvious from the work of T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry. That music has an even greater immediacy of effect than verse is suggested by a comparison of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* and a musical setting of this work, considerably altered by a librettist, done by C. V. Stanford and first performed at Covent Garden in 1901. Parts of the scenes wherein Benedick and Beatrice are baited (in the Orchard, Acts II and III of the play) are replaced by dubious doggerel in the operatic version; yet the memory of Stanford's witty and skittish music makes Shakespeare's words, when spoken, seem flat and a little dull, even in so distinguished a production as that at present running at the Phoenix Theatre in London. And Benedick telling Beatrice, at last, "I protest I love thee" in Shakespeare is translated by Stanford into a lilting melody which abandons Shakespeare's words in favour of " 'Tis like the posy of a ring, love me and I love thee" and is sung by Beatrice. Nevertheless, as Dryden claimed to do in analogous circumstances, the music catches the spirit of the original and translates it into its own terms.

That the excitements of Stanford's musical setting are more intense is perhaps true; that the Shakespeare play is more suave, more balanced, less strained is equally true. If the music has a greater impact upon its audience, it is not necessarily more memorable—if it is more strident it is not therefore more to be admired.

When a verse play makes an impact upon its audience it has a little, a very little, of that stridency of which music can boast; its far

greater asset is a measure of forcefulness combined with a far wider range of expression than is otherwise possible. This applies, I think, *par excellence* to T. S. Eliot's verse, so much of which has a peculiar haunting quality about it, when uttered on the stage. The ideas and sentiments which make up the verse have about them a suggestion of far wider truths than in fact they express. The spectator, as he listens to those truths being uttered, finds himself grasping at deeper meanings far beyond the immediate sense of the words, and having far wider implications than their immediate significance to the play.

Thus Harry in the *Family Reunion*—

"Is the cold spring
Is the spring not an evil time, that excites us with lying voices?"

and Mary's reply which begins—

"The cold spring now is the time
For the ache in the moving root
The agony in the dark
The slow flow throbbing the trunk
The pain of the breaking bud."

And, later on, Agatha's

"Perhaps there is another kind,
I believe, across a whole Thibet of broken stones
That lie, fang up, a lifetime's march. I have believed this."

It is never easy to catch these wraiths of meaning as one hears them uttered on the stage: one merely feels that they are there, and before they can be examined, one is hurried on to something else. Thus the verse as spoken absorbs the attention and the intellect at many different levels; musical settings of words can do this as well, but in a far less subtle way.

It is interesting that those performances of Eliot's plays which have most tightly gripped their audiences have been those done by amateurs. The performance of *Murder in the Cathedral* done in the cloisters of Corpus Christi College at Oxford was more interesting than that done by a largely professional company in Lichfield Cathedral last September: the Oxford company were more alive to the possibilities of meaning in their text and so were more respectful of it. Conversely, the hard-headed company who performed the *Cocktail Party* in Oxford (which was, one must in fairness admit, a good deal staler than a performance seen about eight months previously by the same company at the New Theatre, London), were adequate so long as they were asked to play the West-End comedy which is the stuff of the play: at other moments they were embarrassed, and the audience wriggled. If music has a more strenuous hold on its audience, and so is less subtle, its extra robustness is perhaps a guarantee that its reception will be less fickle. The *Family Reunion* was played at Oxford with the maximum effect

which its cast could have asked; a performance at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre about a year before was received with open sneers and at times laughter. One hears with foreboding that a film has been made of *Murder in the Cathedral*.

There is a great deal in T. S. Eliot's verse, like the allegory in Cocteau's *Orphée*, which is so much for us here and now that one may be permitted to wonder whether his plays will have any power over an audience a hundred years hence. Their performance will continue to be justified so long as they have any power at all to cause their audiences to speculate, or wonder.

PAUL WEST

Trying a hand

Call arid only that winter you willingly bring,
and call that arid only as you would scold a child
that you have bred, and as you scold yourself
about the sequel, gone wrong or for better turned:
yours was the first move and you chose. Remember,
handshake was your venture, ice in the palm
or reassurance to preserve the grip from censure:
over-scrutiny deferred or skipped from confidence,
and something missed about the other person's name:
you cannot help but falter on through eloquence.

And call valid only that season you wilfully start:
uneasiness, the facade unsettled on jumping nerves.
For this came of intemperate thaw. No-one deserves
the life he has, and each to each must contribute
unwillingly cold air, some glossing attribute.
The wheel spins round, must bring to the pointer
some winning season from the segments of encounter,
or fake handshakes like mottoes on this calendar:
hands cold as dice cannot refute, cannot long erase
that we revolve among the seasons and their tendencies
like counters, gambled, but with limited control
of where, among ourselves, once gambled, we must fall.
Prevarication may obscure that we must spin the wheel
that spins or stops us. Daily losses point too well
our choice is our delusion: dullest, wisest cannot choose
but hide relationship for their disease.

BOOK REVIEW

W. H. Auden : Nones (Faber and Faber), 10/6

MR. Auden finds himself at a dangerous point in his career. The wind of revolt is out of his sails, and he is being ballasted with increasing respectability. *Time* magazine reviews his verse, American women's colleges solicit his lectures, and he is invited to rhapsodize with befitting pomp at Phi Beta Kappa chapters. Mr. Auden is obviously perturbed by this state of affairs, and his most recent volume opens with an *odi profanum* addressed to Reinhold Niebuhr:

> *No civil style survived that pandemonium*
> *But the wry, the sotto-voce,*
> *Ironic and monochrome :—*

a rather nerveless echo of the prophesies contained in Pound's *Mauberley*.

Now, there might have been two essential ways out of the static irritation with medium and audience which gives to Auden's *Nones* so minor a quality. Either withdrawal and rarefaction, as in Wallace Stevens' later poems, or an advance toward directness, something of the rage and power in Yeats' final period and the *Pisan Cantos*. Instead, Auden's book varies between frankly minor verse in the *New Yorker* vein, artificial obliquities, and occasional flashes of grandeur in the old style. The claim of the Faber dust-jacket that Mr. Auden neither arrests his own progress nor repeats himself is demonstrably spurious.

The title is worth a moment's notice: *Nones* can signify either the canonical hour at which the passing of Christ is presumed to have taken place, or the ninth day before the ides in the Roman calendar. What Auden is seeking to convey, is a mixed sense of foreboding and actual disaster; Caesar appears in several of the poems, and there are obvious religious themes: the volume ends, moreover, on this 'age of anxiety' note:

> *But the stars burn on overhead,*
> *Unconscious of final ends,*
> *As I walk home to bed,*
> *Asking what judgment waits*
> *My person, all my friends,*
> *And these United States.*

As in the *Duchess of Malfi* (which the first lines echo), we know the stars shine still though Caesar falls, but are not altogether certain of whether Christ has risen. This atmosphere of anguished expectation pervades Auden's *Nones* and gives the collection a certain unity of impact, albeit the poems taken by themselves belong to several disparate categories.

There are pieces of light verse which, at their best, rank well below Ogden Nash. Mr. Auden is ill at ease in the rôle of the American enter-

tainer, a fact betrayed by the mingling of comic patches with ponderous gravity (*In Shrafft's*, for instance), and by lapses from clarity of grammar and taste as in the last stanza of *Music Ho*.

There is a series of highly cerebral variations on themes of post-war desolation, some of which recall Auden's earlier brilliance; there are in these poems echoes of the 1930's — "hostile villages" "suburbs of dissent"—and perfect lines such as

That bridge where an ageing destroyer takes his last salute.

But many of these pieces decline into utter faintness of emotion. Cyril Connolly challenged Auden to write a poem which would compel weeping and received *The Fall of Rome*:

Fantastic grow the evening gowns;
Agents of the Fisc pursue
Absconding tax-defaulters through
The sewers of provincial towns.

Have we advanced nowhere beyond Kafka's symbols and the clipped sparsities of the early Eliot and Pound? How would not Yeats or Hart Crane have handled this magnificent subject? Mr. Auden casts his net over splendid oceans and pulls in tired salt-herring.

The third, and to our mind most rewarding, set of poems in this volume could be designated as occasional lyrics or reflections on art itself. This listening would include the much-praised "Deftly, admiral, cast your fly," the *Cattivo Tempo*, *The Duet*, *Ischia* (a wonderful poem), and *The Love Feast* with its arch borrowing from Saint Augustine. There is no doubt that Auden is a masterful athlete of rhyme, many of whose stanzas advance in constant defiance of the obvious. *Under Which Lyre* especially, would have enchanted the author of *Don Juan*, whom Auden, through his gift of understatement and reserve, at times resembles. There is here distinctly minor verse, but its self-containment is classical.

But on the whole, what makes *Nones* so light-weight and unsatisfactory? First, the poems are extremely uneven and within the longer ones there are exasperating variations in standard (compare, if you will, the sections of *Memorial for the City*). A book cannot be contrived by tacking together poems whose sources range from the *Ladies' Home Journal* and *Mademoiselle* to *The Kenyon Review*. Putting a single title to it won't do the trick of cohesion and sustained tension.

Secondly, Mr. Auden cannot keep out of his verse shadows of abstraction, ill-digested scientific tags, and hints of political theory. As *The Enchafed Flood* tends to show, Auden's ratiocination is neither original nor profound, and when compared with that of Empson or Matthew Arnold, the intellectual weight behind his poetry is slight. In particular, he appears to be puzzled by his American experience, and his incomplete thinking on the subject casts loose fragments to the surface of his poems. *The Chimeras* and *Music is International* are

examples of poetry trying to pass for a monument of intellect, and failing with some embarrassment.

But what really condemns Mr. Auden's *Nones* is its displeasure at language. There is a good bit or jargon, i.e. "catechumens" "cerebrotonic", and a host of unfortunate neologisms such as "sossing" "pantocratic" "goddessling" etc. At times Mr. Auden seems to have a negative ear and it would be fascinating to have anyone scan the first sentence of *The Managers* (and what limp prose it is!). *Le mot rare* is a sound doctrine only if it leads to more intense luminosity, if the medical or jurisprudential lexica yield new richness of sound. But in *Nones* there is little music, save a dry lilt or vague plangency. Will these poems stand re-reading and the ear's legitimate hunger for rhythm? It is in a distorted sense that Mr. Auden has accepted Yeats' admonition: "There is no singing school but studying." Studying music, Sir, not Baedeker or Grey's *Anatomy*.

Nones are to be said in the afternoon and there is not altogether too much time left in which to reassert that poetry must strive after the power and the glory of language, that it is not merely a game for the intellect. We should have fools again and music. The very obligation under which a younger poet stands to Auden should make him avoid some of the tendencies toward thinness of feeling and language all too manifest in this elegantly printed volume.

F. George Steiner.

PAUL ALMOND

Thoughts in Balliol

In this brief peace of quadrangle
The blackbird trots for worms among the oak
And I, thankful for clouds in this
Too steepled city, hear the streets
In their own language shout to me.
Crossing peninsulas, I have wished
There too a way for stars, a rest from forest.
Trees, strong with summer, wrestled
For sunlight beams or silver overhead:
Our looking so became for tiny wildfern
Curious moss, or rare simple flowers.
And as there a lake
Guttering its ripples in a draft of sleep
Made our wished opening for the moon
So I wait here in a shaft of evening
While ladders of bells lean on my heavy ears
To climb, through the new night, into memory.

Published in Oxford by the O.U.E.A.C. Contributions should be addressed to the Editors at Merton College. A stamped addressed envelope must be enclosed. Business communications to Christopher Kingdon, Business Manager, Merton College.

Distribution: John Purkis, Pamela Moore.

Cambridge: Jennifer Plowman, Girton College.

London: Jill Cuthbert, 15 Bedford Way, W.C.1.

Printed by Fredk. Samuels, Ltd., Silver Street, Aylesbury.